DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 593 EA 024 033

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TITLE State High School Graduation and College Preparation Requirements Compared. House Research Information Brief.
INSTITUTION Minnesota House of Representatives, St. Paul. Research Dept.
PUB DATE Sep 91
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Legal/Legislative/Regulatory Materials (090)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; *College Bound Students; *College Preparation; Credits; *Graduation Requirements; Higher Education; High Schools; *Required Courses
IDENTIFIERS *Minnesota

ABSTRACT

A disparity in high school coursework currently exists between college preparation requirements and state board/school district graduation requirements in Minnesota. Because graduation requirements are general, the extensiveness and quality of curriculum requirements can vary greatly by school district and building. This information brief compares Minnesota high school graduation requirements and college preparation requirements. Findings are that: (1) extensive variation in school districts' educational goals contributes to variation in such curriculum areas as vocational education and elective course offerings; and (2) the state board of education is proposing to amend its rule governing graduation requirements and minimum program offerings. A chart offers comparisons of the state's high school graduation and college preparation requirements for grades 10-12 and shows that the state's postsecondary education system preparation requirements exceed those for high school graduation. Three implications for students are identified. (LMI)

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EA

September 1991

HOUSE RESEARCH

Information Brief

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ED346593

State High School Graduation and College Preparation Requirements Compared

The state board of education rules prescribe a general curriculum of courses each student must take in order to graduate from high school. However, there is a considerable disparity in coursework between college preparation requirements and state board and school district graduation requirements. Many states, including Minnesota[1], are in the process of making significant changes in graduation requirements in an attempt to improve the quality of the curriculum.

Minnesota's current graduation requirements are general, prescribing "mathematics" instead of "algebra" and "science" instead of "biology". Consequently, the extensiveness and quality of curriculum requirements can vary greatly by school district and school building. Courses with the same label may have different content, despite the influence of curriculum guides and standardized subject matter tests. Curriculum requirements may be satisfied with various levels of the same course, including remedial, basic, general, and academic levels.

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[1] Minnesota's curriculum requirements have not changed significantly in 60 years.

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There is extensive variation in school districts' educational goals, which creates variation in such curriculum areas as vocational education and elective course offerings.

Some school districts have curriculum requirements that exceed state requirements and other districts have very few local requirements. Some districts and schools have many college bound students whose coursework exceeds the state's curriculum requirements, either because of the students' own academic goals or because of college entrance requirements. Other districts and schools have many non-college bound students whose coursework barely meets the state's curriculum requirements.

According to current state board of education rules parts 3500.2000 to 3500.3100, Minnesota's high school students must complete a total of nine credits[2] of specific requirements in core academic areas: four credits of English, one credit of math, one credit of science, and three credits of social studies. Students must also complete credit offerings in elective areas. Students must complete a total of 20 credits during grades 9 through 12 in order to graduate.

The state board of education is proposing to amend its rule governing graduation requirements and minimum program offerings.

Instead of defining curriculum requirements in terms of subjects and credit hours, it is anticipated that the amended rule will contain a series of graduation outcomes, competencies and performance levels that each student must attain in order to graduate.

The chart on the opposite page contains a summary comparison of current state board of education high school graduation requirements (grades 10 through 12) and the preparation requirements of a number of the state's post secondary systems. The table shows that the preparation requirements of the state's post secondary systems are much more extensive in terms of subjects and credit hours than are the state's high school graduation requirements. In a state where the majority of high school students plan to go on to college[3], this disparity in requirements may:

(1) encourage some college-bound high school students to look to college entrance requirements to determine their course of study;

(2) leave other college-bound high school students inadequately prepared to attend four-year colleges; and

(3) continue to allow numbers of inadequately prepared students to attend the state's community and technical colleges.

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[2] A high school credit is universally defined as a Carnegie unit, or five classes per week for one entire school year. A requirement of 20 total credits occupies a five period school day for all four years of high school. However, there can be variations in the length of the school year or class period, and how a student's time is spent while in school.

[3] See Retention of Minnesota College Students: Reading, Writing and Remedial Education, Working Paper #2, Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department (1990).

Minnesota High School
Graduation and College Preparation Requirements Compared 10 - 12 Grades

Subject	State Board High School Grad. Requirements	Additional Local School Board Grad. Requirements*	Univ. of MN Prep. Requirements	State Univ. System Prep. Requirements***	Private College Prep. Recommendations
English, Communications	360 Clock Hrs/3 cr.	2% required additional courses; most specifically some of the courses to be taken.	3 Years Emphasis on writing; instruction in reading/ speaking skills and literary understanding/appreciation.	3 Years	3 Years
Foreign Language**	None	None	2 Years In a single language.	See "Other"	2 Years
Math	None	25% None 71% 1 semester - 1 year 4% more than 1 year	2 Years Geometry Intermediate Algebra	2 Years Geometry Intermediate Algebra	2 Years
Science	None	21% None 76% 1 semester - 1 year 3% more than 1 year	2 Years Including 1 year each biological science & physical science	2 Years 1 year each biological science and physical science, including one lab.	2 Years
Social Studies	240 Clock Hrs/2 cr. One credit must be in American studies, including history; and one credit in contemporary world problems	22% None 78% 1 semester - 1 year	1 Year Including U.S. history	2 Years 1 year each US history and geography	2 Years
Other	60 Clock Hrs/½ cr. 10th grade in health, physical education	24% require some additional courses. Commonly these are typing, speech or another skill.	Visual/performing arts and computer skills are strongly recommended.	**3 years chosen from at least two of the following: world language, world culture, arts.	**2 Years- visual/performing arts

*Based on an analysis of a sample of 148 public high schools.
**May be partially completed in ninth grade.
***These requirements go into effect beginning fall 1994. Prior to that time, a curriculum similar to these requirements is recommended for freshmen.